

VZCZCXRO2034

RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHNH RUEHPB
DE RUEHHI #1011/01 1230953

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 030953Z MAY 06

FM AMEMBASSY HANOI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1703

INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 1069

RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

RUEVAAN/VA CENTRAL OFC WASHDC

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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001011

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STATE FOR E, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OVIP PREL PGOV SOCI PHUM KIRF VM

SUBJECT: VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY NICHOLSON MEETS

VIETNAMESE PM KHAII

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¶1. (U) Summary: Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Nicholson told Prime Minister Phan Van Khai during their April 28 meeting that the United States strongly supports Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and achievement of Permanent Normalized Trade Relations (PNTR). He emphasized that continued improvements in religious freedoms, human rights protections, access for U.S. POW/MIA searches, and care for veterans will remain important issues for the President and the U.S. Congress. The PM praised U.S.-Vietnam cooperation to date, noting that expanded economic relations allowed Vietnam to afford more care for its veterans. Khai asked Nicholson to convey to President Bush Vietnam's request for quick WTO accession, support for the subsequent PNTR vote in Congress, and increased humanitarian aid for war victims. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In the second day of his visit to Hanoi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Nicholson met Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai April 28 at Government House. Khai warmly welcomed the Secretary, noting that the rapid development of bilateral ties between the United States and Vietnam was greatly assisted by exchanges like this one and the Speaker of the House's recent visit. Khai told Nicholson "we should put aside the past" and focus on our "shared future," a goal Nicholson seconded. Khai also expressed appreciation for the interest U.S. investors have shown in Vietnamese markets, including Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, who visited Hanoi last week. The November 2006 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and President Bush's visit to Hanoi will allow the United States and Vietnam to further develop these economic and political relationships, Khai declared. Hanoi is very much looking forward to welcoming President Bush, he added.

PM KHAII: GROWTH IN ECONOMY EQUALS BETTER VETERAN CARE

¶3. (U) The Prime Minister asserted that the success of Vietnam's "doi moi" or renovation policy that has so transformed its economy has also allowed the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to take better care of its veterans. Vietnam greatly "cares for its former soldiers and invalids," Khai asserted. It also pays for special medical treatment for those with serious injuries.

¶4. (U) Care for U.S. missing in action is also important, said Khai. The U.S. Missing in Action (MIA)/Prisoners of War (POW) search effort is a humanitarian issue. The Prime Minister expressed hope for continued cooperation in the

search for both U.S. and Vietnamese MIA.

PM KHAI'S THREE REQUESTS

¶5. (U) Khai then presented Secretary Nicholson with three requests, asking Nicholson to convey them to President Bush. First and foremost, he said, Vietnam wants World Trade Organization (WTO) accession this year, and certainly before the November APEC summit. He asked for U.S. support and a quick close to bilateral negotiations. Secondly, after WTO accession, Vietnam will also need U.S. support to achieve Permanent Normalized Trade Relations (PNTR) with the United States. This endorsement from the U.S. Congress will be critical, he said. Finally, Khai complimented U.S. aid and assistance programs to Vietnam, specifically praising U.S. programs to help Vietnam combat HIV/AIDS, avian influenza, and demining problems. He noted, however, that while the consequences of war on infrastructure could be repaired, the impact of Agent Orange and damage to severely wounded veterans was more long-term. Because of this, Khai asked the United States to consider increasing the amount given to humanitarian relief programs in Vietnam.

SECRETARY NICHOLSON DISCUSSES BUSH VISIT, MIA/POW ACCESS

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¶6. (U) Secretary Nicholson responded by first expressing pleasure at the opportunity to return to Vietnam after almost forty years. He noted that President Bush was also looking forward to his visit in November. The Secretary said the President also enjoyed hosting the Prime Minister during his trip to the United States last year, a visit that went a long way in furthering bilateral relations. Secretary Nicholson emphasized that the ideas shared during

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these visits and exchanges are important to helping veterans in both countries.

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¶7. (U) The Secretary told Khai he had visited war invalids that morning and discussed veterans affairs with several Vietnamese officials. Secretary Nicholson added that he also reviewed the current POW/MIA programs here, and thanked Khai for giving the United States the opportunity to search the Central and Northwest Highlands, areas where U.S. access was restricted until only recently.

WTO AND PNTR

¶8. (U) Turning to the issue of WTO and the PNTR vote in Congress, the Secretary first noted that President Bush supports Vietnam's entry into the WTO. He commended Vietnam's progress in increasing religious freedoms and human rights protections for the Vietnamese people. These issues are very closely watched by President Bush and the U.S. Congress, he said. The Secretary stressed that continued improvements in religious freedom, human rights protections, care for veterans, and MIA/POW search access will all remain important priorities for the President and Congress.

¶9. (U) Secretary Nicholson concluded the meeting by affirming that Vietnam and the United States shared a bright future because they also shared four important goals. The mutual hopes for peace, prosperity, opportunity, and freedom were the foundations for a strong relationship and even greater development, said the Secretary. PM Khai heartily agreed.

¶10. (U) Secretary Nicholson's staff members have cleared

this message.

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